

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

All the Year Round

A Weekly Journal

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MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

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CHAPTER XXVI. AN ENGAGEMENT.

AFTER nearly forty-eight hours of misery which seemed to grow deeper, more frightening, more bewildering every hour, Maggie was sitting alone in the dark, melancholy little room she called the drawing-room. Her grandfather had been very cross all day, and she had taken refuge from him here. The old man, in fact, was troubled by her unhappy looks, and thoroughly puzzled as to what to do with her. He was anxious, and his anxiety took the form of impatient anger. It seemed to make life a little harder still for Maggie, who honestly thought herself now the most miserable girl in the whole world.

On both these days she had stayed indoors, fearing to meet Arthur Nugent, fearing still more to meet Poppy. Nobody had come to the house. Arthur certainly had made no attempt to see her, and she was left alone with her own thoughts, which were full of remorse and terror. Maggie was not a bad girl. Her love for Poppy had till now been the most real thing in her life. Now she seemed to be only part—the worst part—of a cruel fate which was spoiling Maggie's life. If only she did not exist! If only Arthur were free! But Maggie did not deceive herself with any faint idea of such a possibility. She had character enough to look the thing in the face, and one result of those hours had been a firm resolve never to speak to Arthur again.

It was impossible not to think of him, however. Fate was cruel, but he loved her. It was Maggie's first experience, and she did not for a moment doubt that Arthur loved her, and was just as unhappy as herself. Poppy, of course, would never know, "and as for us, we must live it down," thought Maggie. She had met with the expression somewhere, and found it rather grand and satisfying. But living anything down is a sad business for a girl shut up in a lonely house with a cranky old grandfather. And Maggie was not at all sure that Arthur would feel things as she did. He might expect something to happen; surely, indeed, he must. But what could happen, unless Poppy knew? And then Poppy would break her heart, for she certainly loved Arthur.

All these thoughts, and many that were even more distracting, chased each other through the poor brain as those two long nights and days ran their course. Maggie cried a good deal, and looked sadly at herself in the glass, thinking that she would soon be quite ugly with crying, and that then Arthur would not even want to see her any more. With all her good resolutions, all her remorse for those few minutes in the lane, she wondered with longing in the depth of her heart why he did not manage to come, or write, or by some means send some kind of message.

Then again, when those minutes had been lived through once more, came the terror, the shrinking, that followed them, and the consciousness that never before had she done anything really wicked, really to be ashamed of, anything which altered life and could not be undone. The princess in her tower, as Poppy used to call her, had been rescued; but only to be bound in a worse captivity. For there

was no way at all, it seemed to Maggie, out of this new and hopeless state of things.

Now the fire was nearly out, and it was almost dusk in the gloomy little room, darkened by its own draperies, and by the garden walls which shadowed it from outside. When Maggie heard a man's step coming along the passage, she started from her chair into the middle of the room. How could he dare! Then the maid opened the door and Geoffrey Thorne walked in.

At the first moment Maggie had not a word to say. She gave him her hand almost in silence, and his own being as cold as ice, it felt to him like a burning coal.

"Grandfather will be glad," she said, turning away to the fire. "He was asleep—but we will go to him soon. I was thinking of something else, I suppose, for I have let the fire out. Perhaps he is awake now, though—and it is nearly tea-time."

Her voice was always pathetic, but today it seemed doubly so, with a little hurry, a little uncertainty, in its soft, musical tones.

"May we not stay here a little?" asked Geoffrey. "Don't disturb him till you must."

"Very well," said Maggie.

She did not care. Half an hour more or less made no difference to her. She stooped over the fire and lighted two candles on the mantelpiece. Then she sat down opposite to Geoffrey, still stooping a little towards the fire, so that her face was partly in shadow, and stretching out her hands as if they were cold.

As Geoffrey saw her face, it had all the delicate refinement suggested in his portrait of her, and, indeed, more still. The cheek was a little thinner in its soft outline, and flushed with pink colour; the large dark eyes were more tired, more expressive, the hair curled more softly over the low white brow. What he was doing was all for his queen and empress, Porphyria; but no soft-hearted, imaginative, artistic man could look at this girl without admiration and interest, if not very real sympathy. It could not be denied that she looked extremely sad; that she was very much changed from the girl whose portrait he had begun a few weeks before. He liked Maggie; even in those first days he had found her attractive, though the thought of marrying her had never seriously crossed his mind till Lucy's careless speech that morning. He had not the smallest wish

to marry anybody; but this had come upon him almost as a necessity. He felt and knew that it would please every one, except poor Lucy herself, perhaps. Even the Rector would be glad, though he remonstrated; and it had been Miss Latimer's wish for months.

Yes, that explained everything; her asking him to go to England, her commission to do Maggie's portrait, her objection to a winter in Spain—everything. The thought hurt and wounded Geoffrey to the very centre. All her kindness was because she thought he would be a good match for her friend. He and this girl might be called equals, they would take each other off her hands. The consciousness of all this would have been enough to send Geoffrey off to Spain, instead of bringing him to Church Corner, if he had not seen the queen of his thoughts compassed round with dangers of which she knew nothing, and which a few words from him might perhaps remove for ever. It was a struggle between pride and love, but love conquered, for Geoffrey was well provided with that old-fashioned quality, romance. The realisation of Porphyria's plans for him was pain—almost greater pain, perhaps, than the news of her engagement had been—but it did not for a moment affect his loyalty. He must be her servant still, her faithful dog. In other times he would have been ready to "put his breast against the spears" for her. In these more civilised days he would do anything to please her, and would make any sacrifice to take a possible danger out of her life. If it could be true that Arthur Nugent had lost his senses so far, he would have to regain them now, and quickly.

Geoffrey did not think all this out; he was hardly conscious of his motives, and he had had no time to consider more sides of the question than one—to ask himself, for instance, whether the marriage of such a man with Poppy had not better have been stopped than forwarded. The Rector might have said so, but he had not consulted him. It would have been better after all to bother him, to trust him entirely. As it was, Geoffrey behaved like a very short-sighted hero, only aiming at what would stop any disturbance of his lady's present happiness.

As he sat looking at Maggie in the dim light, his resolution underwent no change, though it became more difficult, and though the more he realised her as a

living woman, the more doubtful he felt of her answer to what he was going to say.

In the meanwhile she had begun to talk, and Geoffrey found himself giving extremely absent and stupid answers to commonplace chatter, which only her face and voice made interesting. At last, by saying something quite meaningless and at cross purposes, he succeeded to his own surprise in making the girl laugh. It was rather a perilous laugh, ending in something not unlike a sob; but Geoffrey hardly knew that, though something in its tone touched him so oddly that he could not laugh too.

"Mr. Thorne," she said, recovering herself, "do you know that you are very funny? What is the matter with you to-day?"

"I have got something on my mind," said Geoffrey. "Don't you know that feeling?"

He got up and stood on the hearthrug, looking down at her with thoughtful eyes.

She did not speak for a moment. Did she know that feeling? Ah, but nothing of such a truth was going to be betrayed to him, good kind fellow as she felt him to be. Much better to make him talk about himself; her knowledges and feelings were no affair of his.

"Well, take it off your mind. Tell me all about it," she said suddenly. "Then you will be able to talk like other people."

She looked up with a pretty smile, seeming for the moment to have forgotten her sadness.

"If I were to take you at your word—" murmured Geoffrey.

"Well, do; only don't make it a very long story, because I hear the tea-things, and we shall have to go into the other room."

"I hardly dare say it; I am afraid you will be angry," he said, after a strange pause, during which her eyes became wide awake with curiosity.

He was asking himself whether he could—whether he really dared—offer his whole self and life to this girl. The question could not be answered; he could only vaguely trust his own intentions, for it was too late to turn back now, or even to stand shivering on the brink.

"I came this afternoon to ask you a question," he said. His voice shook, and was very low; his heart thumped violently. "Do you think—do you like me enough—would you—will you be my wife?"

It was lamely done. He hardly dared look at her, but stared at the floor, ashamed and miserable. He had not, so far, actually told a lie; but it was a terrible business, and Miss Farrant had a perfect right, he felt, to be very angry with him.

She made a little exclamation, "Oh!" and covered her face with her hands. They both remained for a minute silent and motionless. Then Maggie suddenly dropped her hands, rose from her chair, and stood up in front of him.

"You startled me," she said. "Now, will you answer me a question? Answer it truly, like a man. Don't deceive me."

Geoffrey looked at her, and saw that her eyes were wonderfully sweet.

"You are good," she said, "and I trust you to tell me the truth. Is this out of pity? Have you planned this with the Rector, perhaps, because you and he thought that I was a lonely, unhappy girl? I know you saw me the other day when I was waiting for—by the avenue gate. Do you ask me this because you are sorry for me? Now, the truth."

"No," said Geoffrey, still looking at her; "it is not out of pity. It is not because I am sorry for you. Nor have I planned it with the Rector. It is my own wish—please believe that—and if we are both rather lonely, and not specially happy, perhaps, is there any harm in my feeling that?"

He did not and could not give her the best reason, "I love you," and his manner was quiet, almost cold; but in spite of himself, meeting the girl's wistful eyes, he took one of those hot little hands between his own, and stood holding it.

In the meanwhile she was saying to herself: "I should be perfectly safe—perfectly safe. I could do no more harm to anybody. I believe he has been sent from heaven on purpose to save me. And if he wishes it, could it be wrong?"

As the thought of Arthur seized upon her mind, she drove it away with a fury that astonished herself. She looked down at Geoffrey's hands, holding hers; she glanced up, for an instant, into the good dark eyes which were watching her with a kind of patient eagerness, and thought that he was strong, clever, good-looking, that he must love her, that some day she might love him, that her grandfather would be very glad, and more than all, over and over again, "I should never do anything wrong then, never be unhappy, always safe. No one would snub me then,

no one would make me miserable. He would always be good to me."

The last thought made its way somehow into words which just reached Geoffrey's ear: "You would always be good to me."

"As good as I know how," he answered, smiling.

"And you trust me enough?"

It seemed a curious question on a girl's lips, fit to rouse again thoughts, questions, suspicions, which her presence had somehow sent to sleep. For a moment these awakened doubts were shining in Geoffrey's eyes as he gazed at her, and for a moment his whole nature rebelled. What was he doing? If this woman to whom he had offered himself were really in love with another man? The thought was horrible; but then he told himself: "No. There is no deception in this poor child's eyes. Possibly he may have said something foolish; she is unhappy, uneasy, but that is all. I shall be able to keep what belongs to me."

"Why shouldn't I?" he said in answer to Maggie's words; his eyes softened again and the doubts fled.

"But why do you wish it, I wonder?" said Maggie very low. "Do you know that I am not half good enough for you—and—I don't even care—"

"You will, though, won't you, one of these days?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you will," said Geoffrey, and he gently lifted the little fingers to his lips and kissed them. "Let it be yes! If you will trust yourself to me, I will try to make you happy."

"I know you will," Maggie said, but she drew her hand quickly away. "Look here, shall we think it over? Grandfather is waiting for his tea."

"No; I can't do any more thinking. Say 'yes' to me now."

"You are very impatient," said the girl, lifting her head and looking up almost defiantly. "You must remember that I have had no time to think at all."

Geoffrey had now quietly imprisoned both her hands. He was impatient, for complicated reasons which she was not likely to understand.

"You need not think. You know," he said. "You know if it is to be 'yes' or 'no,' and that is all I want. Tell me."

"Then, if that is all you want, it had better be 'no.'"

A flush rose into Geoffrey's dark face.

He was human, and he did not care to be played with.

"Be in earnest," he said. "You don't mean that."

"Well, this is not fair," said Maggie, with a little soft laugh. "I am in earnest. I am thinking of grandfather's tea."

"Say 'yes' to me, and then we can go and tell him. You don't think he will be angry?"

"No; he will be glad," said Maggie frankly. "Well, if you will be obstinate—I hope you won't repent. I never thought you dreamed of such a thing, do you know—"

She could not say much more, for Geoffrey settled the question by suddenly kissing her. He felt desperate. The girl attracted him, no doubt, as girls had attracted him before; an entirely different and quite inferior kind of feeling from that which drew him to Porphyria. But never before had he felt mysteriously fallen and degraded in his own eyes, as he did in giving Maggie that first kiss. This was a strange sacrifice for Porphyria. Apparently it meant that the lower part of his nature was to be put in authority over the higher, and all to gain some end which perhaps was only a shadow. It was very like doing evil that good might come.

The girl escaped from him instantly, without a word, and walked straight out of the room. He thought she was offended, and his face burned with a sort of fury of shame. Overtaking her instantly in the passage, he said eagerly, in a low voice, and with extreme humility:

"One moment—please forgive me! Have I made you angry?"

Maggie turned round. It was dark in the passage.

"I am not angry," she said, and her voice trembled, "only astonished."

"You told me I was impatient," he said. "Didn't you believe it?"

"You are."

She went on quickly, and said nothing more. He hardly knew what she would do or say when they came into the parlour. He felt that he would not himself dare to speak, and that any communication to her grandfather must entirely depend on her. He was not at all sure that she did not mean to withdraw the consent she had only half given. He was in a whirl of excitement, and tolerably miserable, yet quite sure that he would not give her up, now, without a struggle.

There sat the old white-bearded man in

his chair by the fire. The lamp was lighted, the tea-table was set out in the middle of the room, but the curtains were not drawn, and fading daylight still glimmered outside in the garden.

"Maggie, Maggie!" he cried in querulous tones, "you tiresome little fool, where have you been? Look there now, there's the tea getting cold, and you amusing yourself with some of your fine friends just as if I didn't exist. Well, you'll be free one of these days, my dear, but mind you——"

"Here's a visitor for you," said Maggie quickly.

She walked straight across to the window, and stood there a moment, pressing her forehead against the cool panes. What was in her mind? Was she trying to see down the garden?

The old man welcomed Geoffrey with outstretched hand.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Thorne; but you're 'quite a stranger,' as the poor people say. Well now, and what are you come for? To see me, or to begin another picture, or because you want a cup of tea, or all three together?"

"All three together, and—and—" Geoffrey began, and then, suddenly turning away from the fireplace, he followed Maggie to the window, where she was now drawing the heavy curtains slowly round the bow. "Let me do that," he said. "Tell him!"—low and entreatingly.

Maggie did not even look at him in answer, but went immediately across to her grandfather, who was staring at the young man with something in his face which hardly knew whether to be anger or not.

"Mr. Thorne has come to see you, grandfather," said the girl, in the strangest, most careless tone, "because he wants to ask you for something. And he is going to paint lots more pictures, and have hundreds of cups of tea; but not, of course, if you have any objection."

The old man's eyes grew rounder and harder than usual as he listened to Maggie's sweet voice and the odd things it was saying. Even his quick wits were hardly quick enough for her.

"What's the lass talking about?" he muttered.

Then Geoffrey, having finished the curtains, came forward and stood by Maggie, looking hard at her as he spoke.

"Yes, Mr. Farrant, she says I want to ask you for something. So I do—for what you value more than anything else in the world."

"That's a large order," said the old man half to himself. "Well, so you know what you want at last, do you? That's half the battle. And what does Maggie say?—for that's the other half. Do you like him, child? Mind, now, he'll be always painting other people." Maggie bent her head and smiled. "What does your father say, Mr. Artist?"

"He knows nothing yet."

"Well, I must have a talk with him. Tell him I shall be obliged if he will come and see me to-morrow. Now don't stand there, both of you, with nothing to say. Sit down, Maggie, girl, and give us our tea. We shall be better after that. Our nerves are all a little low at present."

He leaned back and watched the two young people with a smile which was really one of extreme contentment, but which looked not unlike acid mockery. Geoffrey felt that it ought to be this, for he deserved it. He felt like a stock or stone, with "nothing to say," as the old man had shrewdly perceived. Maggie, after her first outspoken coolness, had dropped into shyness too, infected by him.

Geoffrey knew that he would be generally considered the happiest of men, engaged to the prettiest girl in the county. He hardly knew whether he was in his senses, but not because he was happy.

Maggie, without looking at him, put five or six lumps of sugar into his tea, and her grandfather watched them both with his sardonic smile. Here, it seemed, was Geoffrey's home, his family, his fate for years to come.

HIS MANY FRIENDS.

WHEN is a play a play? That is one of the questions of the hour. You think the question an easy one? How boundless is your ignorance! And yet I almost fancy that yours is that ignorance which is bliss—in which it is folly to be wise. For, in this matter, the critics are laying down the law, and the more you endeavour to follow its turnings and twistings, as they expound it, the more clearly you will perceive that in that direction madness lies. One of the most disastrous seasons the stage has known was experienced this year. The theatres were empty. The music-halls were crammed to the roofs. People seemed to be turning their backs on their old love, the drama, and taking their money, themselves, and their applause to that

curious hybrid, the "variety" stage. And all the time the critics, who should be our instructors, are tilting at windmills, beating the air. They are suggesting, and more than suggesting, disagreeable things about each other, because they are unable to agree on the first principles of their business, because they are unable to make up their minds as to when a play is a play.

One school of critics maintains that only Heinrich Ibsen and Heinrich Ibsen's imitators can write plays. Another school maintains that Heinrich Ibsen can write anything, and everything, but plays. A short time ago a new drama was produced at the Adelphi—at least it was called a drama on the programme. One set of critics said, in effect, "whatever this thing is, it is not a play." The other set declared, "whatever this thing is not, it is a play." One authority will tell you, by way of instruction, "if you want to know what is a play, study the works of Tom Robertson and H. J. Byron." Another authority will tell you, also by way of instruction, "if you want to know what is not a play, study the works of H. J. Byron and Tom Robertson." Each of these authorities will have his faith so founded on a rock, he will be so positive, and—write it small—so self-satisfied, that you will feel that it is your own fault that you are not more conscious of the value of the information you have received.

Perhaps an unprejudiced outsider, who is not a critic, may be allowed to suggest that both these authorities, though so entirely in opposition, may, if each would only own it of the other, have right upon his side. Even the most complete outsider, who has watched the course of theatrical events during, say, the last twenty years, cannot but feel that the drama is approaching, or, perhaps, is actually passing through, a period of—what shall we say? Revolution would, possibly, be too strong a word. But it is certainly a period of change.

One thing is noticeable: that while one section of the "patrons" of the drama is becoming daily more frivolous, another section is becoming, also daily, more and more in earnest. Some of the older critics seem unable to recognise "pictures from the life" when they see them on the stage. Certainly they resent any attempt to depict real men and women behind the footlights, with a degree of irritability which is, at least, undignified. While, on the other hand, some of the younger critics treat productions which are merely

intended to amuse, in a manner which would almost lead one to suppose that they are of opinion that amusement is the last thing which one ought to expect to find at the theatre. The older men would seem, some of them, to have made up their minds that they will not have a new thing at any price, while the younger men seem equally resolute the other way. Between them, since it is certain that he cannot succeed in pleasing both the houses, the dramatist would seem to be an individual who is blessed with too many friends. And, in the meantime, while the music-halls play, year after year, all the year round, without a single intermission, to crowded audiences, the theatres find it more and more difficult to keep open, under the same management, for six successive months. The weather affects the theatres in the most curious way. Bad weather means bad houses. If there is a spell of hot weather, there is a regular "sauve qui peut" among the managers to be the first to close. Rain or shine, warm weather or cold, these things affect the music-halls not one jot. They care nothing for climatic conditions; they always fill; they never close. It seems unfortunate that the critics—those men of wisdom—instead of quarrelling among themselves as to when a play is a play, do not put their heads together, just for once in a way, and tell the managers how to fill the theatres, if only for a single season, all along the Strand. All these gentlemen are excellent at theory. One would like to see them try their hand at practice, for a change.

Under existing circumstances one cannot but feel that, of his many friends, the dramatist can more than spare one set—his friends the critics. No man shall teach another man how to write a play—that is a play. The playwright must be self-taught. Yet teachers abound. It is possible that he may get good from all of them, except from those men who earn a more or less honest pound by criticising the efforts of those other men who endeavour to earn a precarious livelihood by writing plays. Let there be no mistake. Not because the critics are incapable; still less because they are dishonest. Read all the criticisms of the next play which is produced at a London theatre. You will understand why a dramatist could do very well without his friends the critics.

A play is produced, say, which is the work of a young dramatist. He turns to

the papers to learn what the critics think of it. He finds in paper number one an excellent criticism—excellent! Well written; apparently, well considered. It deals out both praise and blame. The dramatist learns where he has failed, where he has succeeded. He feels grateful. He has learnt something of value. He turns to paper number two. He finds in it another excellent criticism—excellent! It also deals out praises and blame. It also points out where he has failed, and where he has succeeded. But—he turns back to paper number one. Yes, he thought that he had not misread that excellent criticism in paper number one. It actually seems that the critic of paper number two is of opinion that he has failed just where the critic of paper number one is of opinion that he has succeeded, and that—dear me, yes!—that he has succeeded just where the critic of paper number one is of opinion that he has failed. How odd, reflects the dramatist—who must be in possession of abnormal youth—how extremely odd! He turns to paper number three. Paper number three points out, with much frankness and with equal force, that while the work in question may be a tolerable specimen of its class, it is a class which the critic of that paper wishes were dead and done for. It is yet another example of the twaddle and simper school—when shall we see the last of it? A number of lay figures stand in the orthodox positions and deliver the usual lines. Well, perhaps there are still some people who like that kind of thing, and perhaps it is almost as amusing as a wax-work show. Who knows? Still, it is to be regretted that still another person should have arisen who appears not to be possessed of even a rudimentary notion of how to write a play. We have too many “play writers” of that kind already. Because, of course, whatever else this sort of thing is, it is not a play.

If that dramatist were a wise man, at this point he would send the rest of his papers to the butter-shop, and give himself the benefit of a little fresh air. But, instead, he hunts up the critique in paper number four, and finds that he has written the best play which the English stage has seen since the early days of the little house off Tottenham Court Road—now, alas! the critic observes, no more. He has written an honest play. A play to which a decent man can take a decent woman. A play which does not reek of the hospital, but which smells of the cherry

orchards of Kent. The dramatist had no idea that the story of his work was such a pretty story until he read that critic's account of it, nor had he been previously aware that it was quite so namby-pamby. Paper number five observes that the work in question is still another sample of the “nailed together” drama, a miscellaneous farrago of scraps from other men's dramas patched together so as to make an inharmonious whole; while paper number six remarks that there is something about it so pleasingly fresh and so charmingly original that it appears probable that the coming dramatist has come at last. The dramatist feels that he is beginning to lose his mental equilibrium. If he reads the verdicts of his judges to the bitter end he will lose it altogether. He will find that only on one point do they agree; and that point is, that, with singular unanimity, they agree to differ. No two verdicts are alike. Some are entirely dissimilar. Some agree in some respects, only to differ more strongly in others. There is no one point in the work which they all agree to praise, or which they all agree to blame.

Now you will understand how it is that the dramatist can well afford to do without his friends the critics. If he is a wise man he will not pay the slightest heed to them. They will only bewilder him. And one reason why this is the case consists in the fact that there is no standard of dramatic excellence. Every man—critic or layman—has his own standard. Not only so, each man's own standard alters from day to day. You will soon begin to notice this if you study critical pronouncements. In a sense, it is only natural that this should be so. It is quite conceivable that a man may be in a mood to enjoy a particular kind of play one night, and to execrate it another. Professional critics may not be conscious of this peculiarity of human nature. But the commonplace playgoer is aware that on Tuesday he is all agog for Shakespeare, and that on Tuesday week he is capable of nothing but the “sacred lamp.”

Another reason why the dramatist could afford to do without his many friends, the critics, is because, practically, those gentlemen have no influence with the “paying” play-going public. Some of them may think they have, but there they err. They may have a certain sort of influence in professional or semi-professional circles. But with the public they have none. It

seems odd, but, if you reflect, it is a fact, that all the great theatrical successes of recent years have been damned by, to say the least of it, critical faint praise. Hunt up the contemporary criticisms of Tom Robertson's plays. Some of the journals swear by Robertson now. They swore at him then. When you read what the critics have to say on Mr. David James's latest reappearance as Perkyn Middlewick, you will scarcely believe that the same papers in which those criticisms appear slated "Our Boys" on its first production. When Mr. Wyndham recently revived "David Garrick" there was a loud shout of critical approbation. When "David Garrick" was first produced, I doubt if a single critic breathed a blessing. It was only long after the public had made up its mind, that the critics could be brought to see anything in "Our American Cousin"—or, for the matter of that, in Sothern.

Mr. Irving is an amusing example of the influence which critical pronouncements have upon the public mind. To read some of the critics nowadays you would think that the critics had made him. Nowadays, when Mr. Irving gives another Shakespearian revival, there is scarcely a critic who even ventures to hint at the possibility of a shortcoming. Read what the critics had to say when Mr. Irving exchanged melodrama for Shakespeare; it will amuse you. Mr. Irving has not changed in one tittle or one jot. The Irving of yesterday is the Irving of to-day. It is the critics who have changed—as, when, in spite of their anathemas, success attends either a piece or a player, they always do change.

Two amusing, and quite recent, instances occur to me. When "Dorothy" was first produced, it was, according to the critics, dreary stuff. Before it had reached the end of its phenomenal run it had already become one of the most charming, and certainly the brightest, of English operas. Do you remember the reception accorded to "The Private Secretary"? The critics had it that it was something approaching impertinence to produce such trash upon the stage. Already, in the estimation of some of them, it seems to be attaining to the dignity of a classic. Not the least glaring illustration of—what shall we say?—critical conversion has been seen in the case of "H.M.S. Pinafore." I remember what some critics wrote when the piece first saw the light at the Opera Comique, and I remember what those same critics wrote

when the fame of "Pinafore" had bridged the spheres. It is that kind of thing which makes a cynic of a man.

No, it seems to me quite clear that the dramatist, at any rate, could do very well without his friends the critics. They do him no good. They will never teach him how to fill the theatres—never! They will never even help him. Perhaps the public generally could better spare a more useful set of citizens. The plain fact is that, of late, their observations on plays have been more amusing than the plays themselves. If you can believe them, they know so much about the drama, so much more than they care to tell. They know how it is done, how it ought to be done, and how it will be done one of these fine days. For my part, I scarcely ever read a theatrical criticism which did not seem to hint that the critic could have made a much better job of the play than the author had done, if he had only cared to set about it. And I am bound to own that I myself have often sat through plays which I have felt that I could easily have improved upon. After all, critics are but human, though you would not think it when reading some of their lucubrations.

Is there anybody, not connected in some way with "the" profession, who cares one snap of the fingers for what a theatrical critic has to say? Yet theatrical critics occupy more and more space in the papers. This would not be the case if people did not read them. Why do people read what the dramatist's many friends have to say? I read them because I read everything: market reports, police news, advertisements. Why should I leave out the dramatic criticisms? Besides, I read Jones's notice because I anticipate Brown's contradiction of his every word, and Smith's contemptuous disagreement with them both. I am acquainted with a lady who reads Robinson's notices because she assures me that she finds them "absolutely trustworthy." If he snubs a piece she knows that that is just the piece to suit her. She knows that there must be some character about the piece, or else Robinson would be ecstatic. I believe that lady's case to be by no means an uncommon one. Of course, too, some persons read the dramatic notices because they want to know something of a piece, and they think that that is the way in which to find out. In thinking so they are, too often, woefully mistaken. Have you observed

how the dramatic critics in the United States sit in judgement on new plays? They ~~first~~ of all tell you all about the audience. They give you a complete list of the "smart" people who were there. They inform you exactly where they sat, who they talked to, and sometimes what they said, throwing in here and there a few "personal"—amazingly "personal"—"up-to-date" biographical details. They describe the women's clothes at length, and where they got them, and what they paid for them, and so on, for perhaps a column. Then they seem suddenly to remember that there was a play. So they give you vivid descriptions of the scenery, and the mounting, and what the actresses wore, and how the actors looked. And by the time you have reached the end of these notices it is not impossible that you will know exactly what took place in all parts of the theatre except upon the stage. We, in England, have not yet got quite so far as that—they are generally in advance upon the other side—but it undoubtedly is possible, even here, to read all the critics on a new production, and yet when, in your own proper person, you go to see the piece, to find yourself compelled to say, "I had no idea it was that sort of thing at all."

No man has so many friends as the dramatist—and they are such vigorous friends! Every one with whom he comes in contact has, at the very least, sound advice to offer: manager, stage-manager, costumier, scene-painters, scene-shifters, every individual member of his cast. They say that a council of war never fights—there are too many opinions. If dramatists were to listen to, not to speak of acting on, all the advice which they receive, no more plays would ever be written. They receive good-sized volumes of advice before their works are produced. And yet it is only after production that the whole encyclopædia comes. "If Mr. Nailup would only condescend to listen to his critics," writes Robinson in the "Slasher." My dear sir, if Nailup were to listen to his critics, in less than no time he would be in Bedlam. He is, sometimes, more than half-way there already, because, occasionally, he has to listen to advice which is forced upon him by other of his candid friends.

The cloud which hangs over the theatres is but a passing cloud. We have dramatists who, when they are given a free hand, and they are in the mood, can fill them to the roofs—ay, and with delighted crowds.

And, some fine day, a new dramatist shall arise whose works shall be as magic spells. They shall witch the world. They shall be acted everywhere. The playhouses shall not hold the people. His name shall be a power in the land, and in all the lands. I know not what manner of man this man shall be. But I do know this. He will be a man to whom all the critics shall be as though they were not. He will be a man who will care nothing for any word that critics ever wrote, or ever will write. This coming dramatist, this Shakespeare of the future—by the way, where were the critics when Shakespeare wrote?—one may be sure, will be a man who will have rid himself of, at least, the most dangerous of the dramatist's many friends.

And, note this, because he treats the critics with complete indifference, paying them no heed of any sort or kind, at his feet they will bow down and worship in the end. They invariably do do this. For, while they are seldom, or never, able to distinguish the rising sun, they are ready enough to acknowledge his presence when, at high noon, he rules the skies.

THE DIVINITY THAT HEDGES.

A COMPLETE STORY.

THE fellow actually wanted to go through to Khartum! I stared at first, and then told him flatly that it was impossible. He had as much chance of reaching the moon.

"That's as may be," said he; "but, anyway, I'm going to have a try."

"But, my dear chap," I remonstrated, "if you do want to go to a town where all the blackguardism of Africa is buzzing like an upset wasps' nest, why the plague don't you try some more ordinary way—up the Nile; from Suakin; any way rather than from this Heaven-forsaken Tripoli!"

"Because I never heard of any one ever cutting across there from this same Tripoli before. No white man, at least."

"I don't believe it's ever been done; by niggers or anybody. You don't know what the desert is."

"I don't. But I shall do. You'll get me those camels and men, Pemberton?"

It was a bit awkward. Trade's trade to me, ever since I drifted out here and had to start earning a living; but, you see, Brane-Desent had been in my set in the old days at Christ Church, and it goes rather against the grain to give a quondam chum a leg-up towards committing suicide.

So I said: "Look here, I'm not going to

rush into this piece of foolery without my spectacles on. Have a drink, and let's talk it over."

"I don't mind having the drink, and I don't mind talking it over. But if you hope to talk me out of it, you may as well save your wind. If you don't get me those camels and the Johnnies to look after them, some one else will, that's about the size of it. Understand once for all, I'm going."

"What languages do you speak?"

"English, French, Gaelic, and German."

"No Arabic?"

"None."

"Nor Lingua Franca?"

"What's that? Never heard of it."

"Then how the devil do you expect to get along, may I ask? One day's journey outside this hub of civilisation you'll never hear a word spoken that you can understand. Do you expect to go striding a stinking, spluttering camel away out to Khartum in polo boots and a Norfolk jacket?"

"Oh, I suppose I shall have to mount nigger's rig—black my face, and wear a fez, and all that."

"Why, you incomparable idiot, how far do you think you'd get? Your guides would slit your throat before you'd got a dozen miles away from the walls, just to prevent your getting robbed by some one else further on."

"Sure of that, Pemberton?"

"Sure, my good fellow! Do you suppose I've been here in the senna trade for eight awful years without picking up a thing or two about the natives? Go and ask the consul, man."

"I have done already."

"Well?"

"And he said the same thing, and sent me along to you. But I tell you what: I'll bet you fifty to one in English tenners you're both of you wrong. No, don't laugh. I don't want to welsh you. I'll deposit my stakes at the bank here, if there is one, so that you can help yourself if I don't turn up to claim. You see, I don't disguise from myself that there is some risk in the trip."

"That's very far seeing of you."

"Yes, isn't it? But science must be served."

"Science be blessed! All the science in creation wouldn't drag you out there."

He looked rather savage at this last remark of mine, and turned to leave the store with a curt announcement that he should expect me to see about his trans-

port and escort. As he was going I sang out after him again:

"The Florio-Rubattino boat leaves tomorrow. Don't be a fool. Get aboard of her and go off to Leghorn again. You've seen all there is worth seeing in this world's-end hole."

I don't approve of leaving half empty bottles about the place, so I finished the one we had opened; and then feeling very miserable, tapped another bottle, and got outside that, too. This freak of Brane-Desent's upset me. I didn't want to help the man murder himself, and yet—trade was trade. If I didn't make money out of him through getting camels and guides, some one else assuredly would. The halt between these two opinions parched one.

After siesta the fellow turned up again. He seemed in the dence of a hurry to get off. I reminded him that no power in creation could hustle things in Tripoli, and bid him make up his mind to go slow.

He said he would have all necessary patience.

That seemed a point gained. He was not so keen as he had been in the morning. I might yet persuade him to go home and not make a fool of himself. I put the matter to him squarely—told him to think of his sister, and his widowed mother, and all the rest of them, and, in fact, worked myself up to such a pitch that I fairly blubbered.

He took the interference badly at first, and said I had been drinking.

I told him he was an ungrateful brute to say that. I had hardly touched liquor all day; it was anxiety for a dear old college friend which was upsetting me.

He was more civil after that, and with a bit of pressing came out with one of the oddest tales I've ever lent ear to. I didn't care for the way he prefaced his remarks. He said: "Confession eases one sometimes, and I don't suppose you'll remember a word of what I've said by to-morrow morning." He evidently ascribed my emotion to the bottle and not to anxiety for himself. This was an insult, but I did not resent it openly. I shook my head at him sorrowfully, and then bunched myself together and prepared to listen.

"You know Cannes, Pemberton? Of course you do. Well, it was there the thing happened. I've got a bit of a 'cottage en é' below the Californie, and have been putting in some time this winter painting little things amongst the Esterels. I really worked pretty hard, for me, and

only looked in at the club during the evenings. I thought of fixing my pictures up into a little quarto book — Japanese paper, and all the rest of it — just for private circulation, you know. However, I guess that will have to wait over now. I've taken a dislike to the Riviera climate."

He pulled up there, so I broke in :

"The three-day mistral coming on every week ; ice on the Croisette ; great-coats and blue noses. Yes, I know. But then one can always run over to Monte. The salle de jeu is nice and warm, and that American bar at the Café Paris——"

He cut in again there rather dreamily ; I don't think he had heard a syllable of what I said.

"I had walked out that day towards Cap d'Antibes, as it was a bit too blowy for painting, and I met her for the first time. It was just where the road rises for that final dip down towards the town. A gust took charge of her hat and blew it slap into my hands a hundred feet away. I carried it back and she seemed very grateful. She thanked me in German, and blushed a bit. The colour became her. She was a trifle pale before, and, indeed, rather plain. When flushed she would have been noted amongst a crowd. But I had no excuse for loitering ; we were heading in different directions. So I raised my hat, said that I was very glad to have been of any service to her, and went on my way towards Cannes.

"She was very simply and quietly dressed, and had a child with her. I put her down as a German governess, and although governesses are a class for which I have, as a rule, but small sympathy, I felt sorry for her somehow or other, and wished she were in a different sphere of life. In fact, I could not get her out of my head, and in the evening, at the club, I had it put to me with much pointedness that my whist was distinctly off colour.

"By the strangest fluke in the world, I met her again on the very next day but one, and helped her out of identically the same predicament. This time it was down by the harbour, and a sharp eddy of wind had torn her headgear bodily from its moorings, pins and all. The hat was a light, flat-brimmed affair, and took to the air like a kittiwake. Its flight was checked on the very brink of the quay wall by a friendly warp, and I grabbed it just on the hover. The crown was muddied a little, but a wipe from a handkerchief soon put that right. Then I restored it.

"This time it was 'Je vous remercie bien, M'sieu,' with as good a Parisian accent as one could wish for. For the second time, too ! It was so stupid of her not to be more careful of her hats ; so clever of me to save the straw from a watery grave ; but it was the third day of the mistral, and so we might look forward to a spell of calm weather. In fact, she was evidently inclined for a chat, when she caught sight of some one beckoning in a carriage on ahead, and gave me my congé, saying that she must go without delay. I should have felt inclined to press my company a trifle longer if I had followed my own inclinations. But I saw she could be a very dignified little woman when she chose ; and besides, I thought that the old lady in the carriage was her employer, and I knew that governesses usually get it hot when they are seen talking to strange young men in public thoroughfares. So we exchanged bows and parted.

"I saw the carriage go on through the flower market, and noting a stall where it pulled up, went there afterwards and made a purchase, not because I wanted a bouquet, but merely as excuse for asking a question. But I could not make out who my unknowns were. The stall-woman said they were not regular customers. She did not know them in the least. She thought they were Russians, because they were so rich and talked French so well ; but they might be French. I made other enquiries at the club and elsewhere, but without success. Perhaps my descriptions were too vague. Cannes is a comparatively small place, but everybody does not know everybody else. The winter population is a shifting one. The only one suggestion I had given me was that madame was the wife of a Polish financier who lived in Belgium, but after being at some pains to meet that person in a drawing-room, I found she was not the individual I wanted.

"You may think it strange that I was putting myself to all this trouble, but the fact of the matter was, I couldn't knock that little governess-girl out of my thoughts. It wasn't the smallest use to start on the Esterels again ; I couldn't paint one little bit. I did nothing but smoke, and think, and wander about the place in hopes of stumbling across her again.

"I didn't see her for a week after that meeting down by the harbour, and was beginning to fear that she had gone

away from the place. If she had gone, I believe I should have searched Europe through and through till I had found her again; but as it was, that piece of madness was spared me. I was walking up towards the Observatory one day, when I came across her by the side of the canal. She was seated on a camp-stool, busily at work upon a water-colour.

"I believe I almost made a fool of myself at first; very nearly gave myself away, in fact; but we shook hands as if we had known one another for years instead of having met twice over a blown-off hat, and had chatted for three hours before I knew five minutes had passed. I wanted to carry the kit back for her; but she would not let me see her home. She had a quiet little way of ordering, that one never dreamed of questioning. Indeed, one scarcely noticed at the time that her requests were practically commands. So I continued my walk, which had been interrupted, up towards the Observatory, and she picked up camp-stool and paint-box and went off briskly through the pines towards the path below.

"I had gained one thing, however, that sent me off jubilant at heart. The sketch had promise, and was most certainly worth completing, I had impressed upon her as a candid professional opinion; and she, after a little consideration, said that she would probably come back and finish it. 'To-morrow?' She laughed. Perhaps so; perhaps not. When she had time. Good-bye. Poor little governess, thought I, that means you will come when they give you a holiday.

"However, as it happened, she did come on the morrow, and on several morrows, until that picture was finished; and then she started another from another point, and worked as diligently at that. The canal was a favourite walk. This second picture was of a tiny dell full of browns and greens, deeper amongst the pine-woods. I suggested the spot; she accepted my choice; and our *têtes-à-tête* were never broken in upon.

"I was to her merely a journeyman painter. I kept the cash in the background, preferring not to bring that to bear. She was to me the little governess who spoke English, and French, and German with equal fluency. She had travelled widely—as a dependent, I presumed. What country-woman she was I did not discover. I did not even know her name—nor she mine. It was truly '*un*

égoïsme à deux.' And it was self, not status, that each cared for in the other.

"Of what we spoke I cannot tell you accurately. So many things passed in review before us. We seemed to have boundless sympathies in common. She was my ideal of woman—utterly unaffected, yet supremely self-respecting. I grew to know and reverence her character as I had never done woman's before. We met each morning by tacit agreement, and each morning I seemed to find out some new reason to admire her more.

"And so the days were bright for us during a whole month, and then as I judged our mutual feelings had long been as clear as the sky above us, I thought to bring matters to a tardy climax.

"To her eternal credit be it said, she tried desperately hard to stop me, when she saw what my speech trended to. She commanded me to leave the subject; and when I would not, she rose from the soft brown carpet of pine-needles, where we were seated together, and began to walk quickly away. I sprang up, strode after, and seized her wrist.

"'I have told that I love you,' I said. 'You must let me hear whether you will be my wife!'

"'I can never be,' she said very quietly.

"I dropped her wrist—flung it from me.

"'You have been fooling with me,' I said. 'You must have seen from the very first minute how I cared. And yet, after all this time, can you say that I am as nothing to you?'

"She gave a queer little cry. I heard the same once before, in Naples, from a man who was stabbed in the throat.

"'Your answer?' I demanded.

"'I love you,' she said, 'as I have never loved before, and as I shall never love man again.'

"Before the words were all spoken I had her wrapped tightly in my arms, and she lay there quiet as a dead woman.

"'Then you shall be my wife,' I said.

"'It cannot be.'

"'I say it shall!'

"She shook her head.

"'Do you know who I am?' she asked.

"'No,' I told her; 'neither do I care. I have wooed you as the unknown governess of a woman whose name I have not learnt. You yourself are all I ask for. About your ancestry, means, history, and all that, I do not care one rap.'

"She gave a hard little laugh, and—told me her name.

"Great heavens! This girl whom I loved, who had avowed love in return, was a daughter of the highest reigning house in Europe, a princess whom an emperor's son might marry.

"I loosed my arms involuntarily, and started back. I believe I nearly fainted.

"She was ghastly pale, but her wits appeared collected.

"Now you see,' she said, 'how we are situated. Let us say no more. Let us part here—for always. Good-bye.'

"That roused me, and once more I took her in my arms. I pointed out that if she went away my life would be ruined; and, by her own showing, her life would be ruined also. I said a thousand things to shake her resolve. I believe I must have grown almost eloquent—as even a slow-tongued man may do once in his life. I implored her to throw away her share of the empty pageantries, the intrigues, the hollownesses of Court life; grew almost abject in my prayers that she should cast in her lot with mine. Then, as she continued sorrowfully to shake her head, as a last resort, I spoke to her of my wealth, of those heavy thousands which till now had been kept so studiously in the background, and assured her that so far as mere creature comforts went nothing need be lacking. She would lose no single jot in that way, if she would consent to enter upon this new life, for which, from her own admission, we were both equally wishful.

"But there she fired up.

"Do you think so meanly of me,' she demanded, 'as to imagine that a paltry question of money would balance the difference? If I made a morganatic marriage, you may be sure that love would have been the only inducement.' And then her voice sank again, soft and pleading, and in tones that scarcely rose above the soughing of the pines, she told me how she was fettered; how an alliance was already planned for her; how she might help to bring two great nations together; stave off war; prevent the misery of thousands. Her country had the omnipotent claim. Her inclinations, and mine, were as nothing compared to that greater call. As I loved her; by the kiss she gave me then—the first and last; as I was a man; she bade me help her do her duty.

"And then she went away.

"The scent of the pines seemed to have vanished; the mistral came down cold and rain-laden; Cannes was Aceldama."

He stopped there. After a pause I suggested:

"And so?"

"And so, Pemberton, I came out here, made up my mind to cut into a new line—scientific discovery, and all the rest of it. Well, ta-ta, old man. Give the Geneva bottle a holiday this evening and get those camels for me, like a good chap. You can understand that a change of air and scene are necessary for my health."

And then he went out of the store.

The senna trade is thirsty work. Besides, that infernal Khartum idea of Brane-Desent's worried me. So, perhaps, during the next day or two I did nip rather heavily. The climate also had much to do with it. If you know Tripoli, you will understand that, for an Englishman there exporting senna, such a course is unavoidable. Anyway, I got confined to the house with a touch of the old complaint, and in the meanwhile my scoundrelly Greek partner got Brane-Desent what he wanted. The fellow said, when I cursed him about it, that if we hadn't raked up the camels, some one else would have done. Besides, he never let sentiment stand in the way of money-making, and, as it was, we'd cleared a good round sum out of the transaction.

So off our explorer had gone. And, perhaps, come to think of the matter, it was for the best.

IN A TRAVELLERS' SMOKING- ROOM.

If a professional valuer were appointed to appraise the objects which deck the walls of our smoking-room, he would probably, although consumed with genuine anxiety to make the best of a poor job, shrug his shoulders and say politely that he didn't think they were worth valuing, and that there was not a single article which would command a bid from a disinterested outsider.

And he would speak the truth. But valueless as are the contents of our smoking-room from a market point of view, to us, the collectors, they are priceless simply on account of the associations linked with each object.

Let me preface briefly. It is not an ornate smoking - room of the modern aesthetic pattern, but is fitted up far more with cosiness as an object than effect, and

it is purposely situated in a remote corner of the house, partly so that unrestrained talk and mirth may go on until any hour of the morning without annoyance to the other occupants of the house, and partly because the aroma of a dozen pipes could hardly penetrate beyond its double doors.

The first object which usually catches the visitor's eye is a large key, suspended to a brass-headed nail. As a key it is not a curio, but its translation hither is curious. One of us was a middy on board the "Iron Duke" during the cruise when she ran down the "Vanguard," and whilst the ship was at Lisbon went ashore with some chosen companions. After a more or less frolicsome career through the streets of the Portuguese capital, the young gentlemen espied the door of a majestic building open, and, in the innocence of inquisitive youth, entered. It was the Grand Opera House, and a rehearsal of the opera of "Guillaume Tell" was in full swing. This so delighted the young Britons that they not merely applauded frequently and vehemently, but, no doubt with the best intentions, joined in the choruses.

So far from appreciating this uninvited aid, the singers resented it, the result being that after a scuffle the young gentlemen found themselves in the street and the door slammed on them.

But the slammers of the door had overlooked the fact that the key was outside, and the middies quietly took their innings by locking the performers in and walking off with the key.

How or when the artistes were released history does not say, but the key hangs in our smoking-room.

Above the key is slung an alpenstock, with a gourd suspended to it.

At a certain period of life some of one's saddest memories are those which speak of enjoyments and recreations which have been outgrown, or, it should rather be said, for the thorough appreciation of, and indulgence in which one has got too old. Such are the feelings of the shelved cricketer, or rowing man, or hunting man, or mountaineer. After this age, other recreations and pursuits assert their sway, and the feeling of sadness wears off.

This alpenstock is one of the memorials which are still rather sad, for its battered, branded length is eloquent with the recollection of happy nights and days, such as can only be happy to one in the full strength and hardihood of young manhood.

It is no ornamental stick, bought at Chamounix or Interlaken, ready branded with the names of peaks within the shadow of which it has never been, but is a regular climbing tool, and although the owner was not a regular cragsman or a member of the Alpine Club, it has helped him in the ascent of as many mountains as the average holiday-maker, who does not make a toil of a pleasure, wants to get up, and if endowed with the gift of speech could tell one or two stirring tales of adventure amidst the eternal snows of Alpine solitudes.

Mention of mountaineering leads us to another relic close by, a small bronze bell of quaint design. It is a Japanese pilgrim bell, and it recalls one happy week out of four as happy years as are granted to ordinary men. Very well I remember obtaining that bell. It was September, Anno 1873. The Tocaido, or the great road of the Eastern Sea—then relatively a livelier and more flourishing institution than it is in these days of the ubiquitous railway, but sadly shorn of its ancient glories—was crowded with the swarms of pilgrims who annually flock to Fuji-San—that peerless mountain of which the shape is so familiar to all who possess objects of Japanese manufacture—or to O-Yama, a less important but very holy mountain.

It was blazing hot weather, and we were halted at the "Lobster" tea-house in the village of Koyias, at the foot of O-Yama; the tea-house, large as it was, was crowded to overflowing, and we, having dined off stewed fish, and rice, and seaweed jelly, and "zakidofu," washed down by the good wine of the "Leaping Carp," were smoking our pipes as we watched and sketched the motley crowd of men, women, and children who were coming and going, eating and drinking, singing, laughing, chattering, haggling, and gesticulating on all sides; we in turn being central objects of curiosity, for in 1873 the globe-trotter had not been let loose on the fair Land of the Rising Sun, and there were yet many places within easy distance of Yokohama where the figure of the "stupid invader" was but rarely seen.

Near to us was a respectable old gentleman—as was evident by his travelling in a chair, and with servants—who took a lively interest in our sketching. We struck up an acquaintance, and in return for some sheets of character drawings, he handed us his bell, with a long explanation of which we did not understand a word.

We carried that bell about with us for a

week, and brought it home as a relic of an old-world institution, which has probably passed away from Japan for ever, as we hear that the modern pilgrim travels by rail as far as he can, instead of spending a pleasant, rollicking week on the road, and is by no means faithful to the old rule that the good pilgrim, of whatsoever condition, should be clad in white, should only carry with him absolute necessities of travel, and should bear his bell.

On the same shelf as the bell straddles a ferocious-looking beetle of large size. Although but a beetle, he is a reminder of very happy days spent in quite another part of the world. His home was the West Indian island of Dominica—loveliest, saddest, and stillest of as fair a circlet of colonies as Britain possesses. All the West Indian Islands, save St. Kitts, Antigua, and Barbados, are beautiful; but we fell most completely in love with Dominica, not so much, perhaps, on account of its beauty—for St. Lucia, Trinidad, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tobago, and Jamaica are as beautiful—but because of the forlorn, neglected, unvisited condition, which invested it with almost a pathetic air. The beetle is really the mildest and shyest of creatures, and the mandibles which give him so formidable an appearance are only used for tearing out the pith of banana stems. It was a lovely spot where we found him—on the rough pony track which traverses the heart of the mountains to the Fresh Water Lake; behind us a dense bank of the most glorious trees, ferns, flowers, and jungle imaginable; in front of us a mighty ravine thickly clothed with forest, and dividing us from a mountain mass, wooded to the very summit, and probably untrodden by the foot of man—absolute silence, save for the occasional call of the mocking bird, or the rustle of a big lizard through the undergrowth; a deep blue sky above us, from which shone a sun whose rays would have been murderous but for the faint, sweet breeze blowing up from the sea hundreds of feet below us. We spent a fortnight in this Dominican paradise, and we left it with feelings of regret quite as intense as those with which we took our farewell look at Japan.

Side by side with the beetle are two more West Indian relics. One is a ball of asphalt taken from the world-renowned Pitch Lake in the island of Trinidad.

This Pitch Lake is an orthodox sight, by which we mean one of those sights not to see which is regarded as a heresy

scarcely less lamentable than to visit London without seeing Westminster Abbey; but on account of its unique character is a sight which is really worth taking some trouble to see. This trouble is pleasant enough, consisting as it does of a railway journey to San Fernando, and a steamer trip across the bay to La Brea.

La Brea, although in Trinidad, offers no scenic attractions. It is a squalid, ordinary collection of huts which give no inkling of the boundless wealth lying close by. A short but trying walk along an exposed road torn into deep ruts by the passage of the asphalte carts leads to the lake—an open space of nearly a hundred acres consisting entirely of pitch.

One may walk freely on the surface, but there are spots where it is advisable to step quickly in order to avoid a bottomless grave. Carts are busy on all sides filling up with the stuff, as they are busy every day and all day without producing any apparent effect on the supply, for a pit dug out overnight is replenished by the morning.

The other relic is also a ball, but of lead, and was brought from the highest battery of the deserted fortifications on the top of Brimstone Hill in the island of St. Kitts.

Excursions to scenes of faded human grandeur are always tinged with melancholy, and although the Gibraltar of the West Indies, as Brimstone Hill was called, was only evacuated some forty years ago, one is impressed there much as one is at Pompeii or in Egypt. It is sad to wander up and down through magnificent ranges of buildings which are not by any means ruined, although they are utterly solitary, and quite choked with the luxuriant tropical vegetation which has sprung up unchecked, and to think of the active, stirring, gay life that once throbbed here, and in the half-ruined town of Sandy Point on the shore below.

We brought away this rusty old ball as the solitary portable relic we could find of this life; but if its memory is kept alive in no other way, it is by the huge tanks from which in times of drought the owners of the cane-pieces below are glad to draw their supplies of water.

The "next article" is regarded as a curiosity in the south of England, although north-countrymen are moved to mirth at the notion of its being considered worthy of a place amongst genuine curiosities from far-distant lands. It is one of the small

leather caps with peak behind worn by coal-pitmen, and is a souvenir of a descent into what was ten years ago one of the deepest pits in England—that known as the Wearmouth in the heart of the town of Sunderland.

The gentleman who parted with this cap parted with half the attire he had on at the moment; the other half being his knee-breeches. When we accosted him he was lying on his back hewing at the wall of coal beside him in company with three or four "marrows" similarly attired and occupied. It was in one of the deepest workings of the pit, and notwithstanding the current of air passed through, the heat was tremendous. To learn what absolute silence means, one cannot do better than separate oneself from one's party in the depths of a coal-pit away from workings. I know of nothing like it save the silence of the Royal burial chamber in the heart of the Great Pyramid, and so absolute is it that it is with a feeling of genuine relief that one rejoins friends and hears the sound of voices.

Some of the pleasantest recollections summoned up by a survey of the articles in our smoking-room are associated with sundry unimportant and uninteresting-looking bricks, tiles, and fragments of pottery, lying on a shelf apart, which were in constant danger of being consigned to the dust-bin as "rubbish" by zealous hand-maidens, until a distinct law had to be passed that this one room in the house was never to be invaded by wielders of pan and brush.

We had the Roman fever once very strong amongst us, and these relics are from various parts of the ancient Roman empire, and tell of many a pleasant holiday in the past.

For instance, this marble fragment of what must have been a graceful and delicate little female figure, was lying on a heap of rubbish close to the House of Cesar in the Roman Forum. Vandalism it may be called to rob a land of even its humblest antiquarian treasures, and we should ever be first and foremost in maintaining this, but this fragment had evidently either never been noticed or had been spurned as unworthy of notice, and we were anxious to secure a little tangible something to remind us of long, happy mornings and afternoons spent amongst the faded glory of old days.

There is a tile from old Verulamium,

and, strangely enough, like its neighbour, which was brought from the villa at Bignor, on the Sussex Stane Street, it is deeply impressed with the exact pattern of the Union Jack.

This stone is from the old Appian Way, far beyond the usual tourist limit, the Tomb of Cecilia Metella, and not far from the traditional site of the "Three Taverns." It had to be cleared of a fine crop of grass before it showed itself.

A large heap of ware—brown Upchurch, red Samian, and common blue brown—was collected during a pilgrimage along Hadrian's Wall, between Newcastle-on-Tyne and Bowness-on-Solway—a most delightful four-day tramp in the finest weather, and through a country of which almost literally every acre teems with antiquarian, historical, and romantic interest.

One object has a place amongst these relics which has no right there except that to it hangs a tale. It is a bit of red tile, and this is how it was unearthed. Two of us, enthusiasts for Brito-Roman remains, were hard at work with spade and pick, in rain and mud, on the Roman Camp at Whitley on the Maiden Way, between Alston and Slaggyford, in Cumberland. We had toiled for a long time without success, and were on the point of giving the job up as a bad one, when the pick struck something hard, and amidst expressions of delight a fragment of red tiling was dragged forth.

This was at the close of day. Carefully, almost reverently, we took it to our inn, and, after supper, washed the dirt off on the chance of finding a maker's stamp. We did find it, and it was—

"Smithers, West Bromwich."

It was such a true sell to mistake a modern drain-pipe for a Roman tile that, although contributing to our own ridicule, we kept it. But we could tales unfold of mistakes quite as ludicrous made by regular Dryasdusts, men who have written books and delivered lectures, and who have stuck to them with a pluck worthy of a better cause. Indeed, we have in a cruel moment passed this very fragment off on one of these gentlemen as a genuine "bit," and were punished for our deception by a long lecture upon Roman pottery and tile work, bristling with quotations, and delivered with all the prolixity dear to the Dryasdust heart.

Next is a fire trophy flanked by two helmets. One is an American fire hat of

leather with a deep flap behind, a relic of the days of Yokohama before any foreign organisation of fire companies came to the assistance of the poor Jappers, who were quite content to face the largest conflagrations with syringes which would hardly sprinkle a rhododendron bed. This old hat has been in many a fire, for what was destruction and often death to the natives was the best of fun to us youngsters, and cheerfully would we turn out during the small hours of winter mornings to have a hand in a fire. But the state of affairs became serious when two or three foreign houses were burned to the ground for the want of a proper fire service, and the matter was discussed, and by the next winter we had two very smart fire companies with steam engines, and brass helmets, and all the rest of it.

The other helmet belonged to the chief of the Tokio Fire Brigade. It is a tremendous affair of brass and copper, elaborately decorated, and formerly was topped with big feathers, for the chief was a very great man, and rode on horseback, and had his standard-bearer. All this sort of pomp and circumstance has been swept away by the new broom of Western civilisation, so that this old helmet is a genuine relic of things that were and will never be again.

The two fire-hooks between the helmets have done good service in their time; and they, too, as being obsolete, are curiosities.

A variety of odds and ends speak very plainly to us who regard them as old friends of days gone by, and of scenes which, if they be revisited, can never be revisited in quite the spirit of the past.

There is a Zulu war-shield of oxhide picked up at Isandula by that same member who pocketed the key of the Lisbon opera-house, and who served through the campaign as a volunteer; over which is a formidable array of war weapons from Fiji and New Zealand.

A group of Chinese josses, much stained and battered, are curious in that they belonged to a Canton junk which, during that terrible typhoon which ravaged the coasts around Hong Kong some twenty years ago, was carried bodily inland by a huge wave and deposited in a paddy field a quarter of a mile from the shore.

We pass pans, and lacquers, and bronzes, and such things which, although curious enough when they were brought from the Far East twenty years ago, may now be bought as cheaply in London, Paris, or New York; but we pause for a few mo-

ments at a small object which nine people out of ten would pass unnoticed. It is an insignificant little bronze ornament, with its ornamentation knocked away beyond recognition.

It once was a candlestick attached to a drawing-room mirror in one of the most charming of the many country houses which before the great war abounded around Paris generally, and St. Cloud in particular. The owner of this pleasant retreat on the Route du Calvaire, a Spaniard of good family, was a somewhat more than locally famous collector of all that was rare and original and beautiful in porcelain and faience, and his rooms were at once the delight and the despair of all who were smitten with this elegant mania. More than this, his house was a social centre for the Spanish colony in Paris; and the writer will never forget the sweet summer Sundays spent in the fine old garden in the company of men and women who seemed to reflect in tone, in attitude, in manner, and in style of conversation, that old-world politeness and brilliancy and courtesy which many Englishmen are apt to believe existed nowhere but in the great French salons before the Revolution.

Then came the war, and the advance of Germany to the gates of Paris.

The priceless collection of porcelain was carefully packed in the cellars, the house shut up, and the family withdrew into Paris, and there they remained until the storm was over.

The last devastating fires lit by the Communists in Paris were still smouldering when the writer, who was living at Chantilly, by the condescending permission of the officers of the Prussian Augusta regiment, went into Paris and from Paris to St. Cloud.

I had seen plenty of the track of war by this time, but never to such fulness as when I stepped ashore at St. Cloud. Scrambling, tumbling, climbing over heaps of ruins, I made my way through an utterly silent and solitary world along what I guessed was the route to the old house—or rather to the site of it. The four walls remained, nothing more. Shells and flames had done their work but too well. The beautiful garden was a howling waste; the terrace was scarcely to be traced.

Amongst the chaos of rubbish I sought a memento of old times; and this little bronze candlestick top was all I could find.

I learned afterwards that the Germans had occupied the villa, but had been shelled out by Mont Valéien, and that the collection of porcelain was found untouched in the cellars, although not a bottle of wine had escaped.

Pleasant recollections are called up by a massive rosary with crucifix attached. This came from Mont Saint Michel, and is a memento of a walking tour in Normandy. We could walk in those days, as the record of our itinerary testifies. We were not particular where we slept or what we ate and drank, and the vision is still fresh of sunlit roads winding through a picturesque country of orchard and pasture, of quaint old towns with fine churches and rich in "bits" for the sketch-book, of odd little wayside inns, of market-places crowded with picturesque buyers and sellers, and of a cheery, kindly people, amongst whom it was a real pleasure to be a stranger.

Of the sundry relics dotted about passing notes will suffice. Here is a fir-cone brought from that historic spot at Concord Bridge, in the State of Massachusetts, where was fired the "shot heard round the world," and where a plain slab let into the rough stone wall, which bounds the domain of Hawthorne's Old Manse, records the "grave of British soldiers."

Here a pair of mocassins, worked by Indians of a tribe with an unpronounceable much less writable name, recalls a midwinter visit to Niagara, and the experiences of life with the thermometer at twelve degrees below zero. Here a variety of flags and emblems recall the excitement of a Presidential Election in the United States.

A small trophy consisting of a wire-gauze mask, a long-handled tin shovel, and a fool's cap and bells, is a memento of a certain carnival at Nice, when, during the best part of a day, a party of usually sedate and presumably sane Englishmen and women were in the heart of the Battle of the Confetti, and wound up with a wild arm-in-arm dance, somewhat of the Carmagnole type, up the Avenue de la Sare. Of course there are pipes of all sorts and sizes and shapes—from the massive German porcelain with its three feet of stem to an old English four-inch clay, which was found in the cellar of a house at Streatham—including Chinese opium pipes, Japanese pipes, bubble-bubbles, hookahs, Italian terra-cottas, Indian, "cum multis aliis." Here we bring our rapid survey to

a close, although we have not alluded to one-half of the objects accumulated in what may fairly be called a Travellers' Smoking-Room, inasmuch as their interest is personal rather than general.

"TOOZEY."

NORTH-EAST Essex! The very name is suggestive of the flat, the commonplace, and the utterly monotonous. However, we managed to extract some little enjoyment from the scene as we went jog-trotting along one fine clear day from Frinton-on-Sea to St. Oyth's. The said jog-trotting was necessitated, I suppose, by our steed being probably Essex raised, and therefore as free from any form of excitement as the character of the scenery, or of the inhabitants themselves.

On the one side of our sandy road lay flat, far-reaching stretches of marshy pasture-land, divided here and there by feathery lines of tall fen grasses; on the other, green meadows and brown harvest fields swept outwards to the sea. The hedgerow was well-nigh covered with brambles and blackberries, the latter in all stages of colour, from the pink flowers to the ripe, purple berries; then there was a brave show of scarlet "hips and haws," and here and there a gleaming line of yellow toad-flax, a clump of white campion, or a group of red poppies.

The chief feature of the way was the little wooden houses—much more warm and comfortable, we were told, than the ordinary brick or plaster cottage—with their cheery-looking front gardens, bright with dahlias pink, dahlias red, and all the mixed and striped varieties so dear to the heart of the cultivator. Dahlia glories, however, always mind one of on-coming autumn, and we found further signs of the season in hints of red and yellow among the bramble leaves; the cornfields, too, had become stubble, much to the delight of the numerous sheep and black pigs there disporting themselves in diligent search for stray ears of corn—energetic gleaners, those, and free from unpleasant calculation of ways and means, too prolonged potations, and other evils to which their two-legged betters are prone.

Presently we passed through the old-fashioned village of Great Clacton, and then, as we neared St. Oyth's, there appeared an inexplicable blaze of colour—no ordinary roadside greens and browns,

but long stripes of brilliant blues, dull purples, bright pinks, and startling reds, relieved by squares of green in all its various tones, and, squandered amongst it all in grand profusion, shining lines of yellow, orange, and golden-brown. This was the flower farm of a well-known firm of London seedsmen.

At last we found ourselves at St. Osyth's, or, as the inhabitants prefer to call it, "Toozy," and stopped to buy the necessary tickets to "view the Priory." These were to be had, at the modest sum of six-pence each, at the "Red Lion," where, as the guide-book points out, there is "a carved lion couchant over the swinging sign," and a most dejected, dark-red gentleman he is, evidently suffering from a bad attack of toothache, if one may judge from the attitude of his fore-paw and the severity of his countenance.

We were soon waiting admission at the Priory gate, armed with a Lancaster camera, but the lady of the lodge seemed accustomed to such imprudence and prohibited its further entrance, so we had to content ourselves with taking an outside view of the gateway, a very handsome late Norman structure of hewn stone and flint, according to the ever-present guide-book.

Once inside, and having duly admired the house—an irregular-looking pile of buildings of various dates—we wandered through the old-fashioned gardens to the chapel. This has been lately restored, and is used daily by the "sisters" and others living at the home of rest, established by the present owner of the Priory.

At every turn one is greeted by remains of old work, some Tudoresque, some thirteenth century, some Norman, and some reputed to be Roman. We ascended the tower, and looked across to the sea, wondering, as one will wonder, how many before us had watched that same sea, had looked, perhaps, for coming friend or foreign foe—for St. Osyth's has seen many troublous times from the day when its saintly founder was murdered by the invading Danes, till the time when it was plundered and ravaged by an "unruly mob of schismatics" in the civil wars of the seventeenth century.

Of course there are dungeons belonging to the building—gruesome, noisome cells stretching along underground to the beach below; but now happily blocked up. There is also a ghost; and this is its

history: "The Danes, under Ingvar and Hubba, landing from a creek close by, and hunting for prey and plunder, found the Lady Osyth at the fountain and cut off her head. When the head first rolled from the shoulders at the stroke of the cruel Dane, she picked it up tenderly with her hands and carried it to the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul; but the door was shut, so she knocked at it with her blood-stained hands, and then fell prostrate—dead." And now, on each anniversary of her death-day, at the witching hour of twelve, Saint Osyth walks again—head in hand. It would be interesting to meet some one who has seen her, and to learn if ghosts are able to speak in this curious and anomalous position. Our guide, however, could not help us; she only knew that there was a general inclination to keep to the more frequented paths as night came on, and that there was one old man who steadily refused to go through the old tower even in twilight.

From the Priory we went across to the church—being met at the door by the vergeress, who deeply lamented our being just too late for the harvest festival decorations, which decorations, according to her account, must have been quite as well worth visiting as the Priory itself. There were left, however, traces of an arch of greenery, ornamented by small coloured candles of the Christmas-tree type; also a wonderful banner adorned with horns of plenty—in gold paper—and a scythe—in silver ditto—and so we were able to console ourselves with the thought that possibly the other and ordinary attractions of the church might prove even more satisfactory.

Our first impression of the interior was, however, decidedly depressing—vide, a wide nave filled on either side with very light-coloured, old-fashioned, high-backed pews, decorated here and there by what at first sight looked to be milliners' blocks, but which, on further enquiry, turned out to be stands for the necessary evening oil-lamps.

Round each pillar is an ordinary hat-rack, affording every accommodation for high hats, low hats, overcoats, and possibly umbrellas; we noticed further two old-fashioned square pews, one—an heirloom of the D'Arcy family—roofed in so as to present the idea of an ancient dismembered coach. The most striking feature of the church is the altar rail, formed somewhat in the shape of a horseshoe—an exact copy

of the shape of the old oak rail, not so very long taken away.

On either side of the altar is a massive sculptured monument representing a former owner of the Priory, and all around the chancel is painted—oh, that one should live to tell it!—a short edition, about three feet high, of the favourite red velvet dramatic curtain on an equally imaginary brass rod. Some fine modern stained glass has, however, been added to the chancel, and the archaeologist will be interested in a low side window, a “squint,” and other relics of ancient date.

One might, indeed, spend hours most pleasantly and profitably in the precincts of St. Osyth's; the village itself has a thoroughly old-world air about it, as though the influence of bygone ages were still breathed out from the Priory walls, and rash and bold would he be who ventured the latest improvements in things, mundane or spiritual, under shadow of those two ancient landmarks, the church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and the Priory of St. Osyth. Indeed, we fancy, it might not have been so very long ago since the good people, before going to bed, “did rake up the fire, make a cross in the ashes, and pray to God and Saint Osyth to deliver them from fire and water, and all misadventure.” And so we turned homewards, in the evening light, amid the white mist rising from the rush-lined marshes, pondering on the days of old so picturesquely present with us, and convinced that in the flats of North-east Essex may be found beauty, interest, and pleasure.

MARA.

A STORY IN EIGHT CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR the next hour Desmond Blake lay alone with no companion save his own sad thoughts. He knew that in all probability he would never live to see the sun rise again; he knew—none better—the fierce, implacable hatred of these men who had plotted against him; yet he gave hardly a passing thought to the danger which would have paralysed most men—his mind was with his wife.

Memory took him back to the time when he first saw her, pictured to him the country church, and that fair, lovely face which he had loved at first sight. He thought of the days that followed,

when he had hardly realised himself what she was to him; he saw again that scene by the riverside when he had avowed his love for her.

He lived for the second time through the delirious joy of his engagement and early married life, the trust and faith in his wife, the love he had lavished upon her, to be repaid by an occasional kiss, a sweet word carelessly spoken. Yet how well she had acted affection for him! So well, that now the whole crushing truth had come upon him, he was thankful to think that it would all be over soon, that in a short time he would be past all human sorrow.

Pat came at ten o'clock, with angry remonstrances on his lips at his master's determination to get up; but Desmond would listen to nothing. The dressing was a long process, for he nearly fainted twice from exhaustion; but at last Pat helped him downstairs to the drawing-room. He fell into a half slumber there, and the clock had struck twelve before he was roused by a noise from outside, a dull, heavy tramp, tramp, and the low murmur of many voices. He listened with a smile on his face as the tramp came nearer and nearer, till it stopped outside the hall door. Just then Warden came into the room.

“Did you hear?” he asked hoarsely.

“Yes, I heard. There are a good many of them. How many policemen have you got?”

“Twenty-two. Oh, Blake, give it up! Give it up! It might not hurt you if you were in health; but now— Any blow will be almost fatal to you.”

Blake rose, and the two men stood face to face.

“A week ago,” he said slowly, “I would have taken your advice, perhaps, though it would have gone sorely against the grain to shirk any fight. But for my wife's sake I might have tried to keep safe. Now—Warden, you must know how I loved her; you must know that, after learning what I have to-day, I don't care to live. So don't say any more, only do your best to show these fellows what fighting means.”

“One thing I must ask, Blake. Will you forgive me—will you shakehands with me?”

Desmond held out his hand and gripped the other's closely.

“I do forgive everything. You will see her again. Will you tell her so—tell her that I love her to the last? And my mother—I don't know what to say to her; I should like to have seen her again. Warden, they will have that door in; don't open it till I come. Leave me for one moment.”

He took up a portrait from the mantelpiece—a large, distinct likeness of Mara, that gave back her wonderful beauty with almost living reality—and looked at it lingeringly till the limpid, hazel eyes seemed to meet his with the old bewitching smile that he knew so well! How he loved her, loved her even now, when she had deceived him, forsaken him, in his hour of danger left him to a death which she might have averted!

The great hall door was echoing to the fierce blows of the enraged mob outside it. They had tried to unlock it with skeleton keys, but in vain, and they were beating upon it wildly in their ungovernable fury, when there was a sound within of the bolts being withdrawn. Involuntarily the men nearest it fell back as it opened slowly, and Desmond Blake stepped out and faced them, while close at his side Warden stood, and behind were the band of policemen.

For a few moments there was silence—dense, dead silence—while all those wild, glaring, bloodshot eyes were riveted on the tall figure who stood on the steps above them unmoved.

"Boys," he said quietly, "what do you come here for? And why do you try to force into my house? When did Desmond Blake ever refuse himself to any one?"

No one answered, and he went on :

"You want to speak to me, I suppose. I am ready to listen."

A hoarse cry came from the crowd.

"We want your life, Desmond Blake. You have hunted us down long enough, and now your time is come."

"You want my life! Hunted you down! Yes, I have hunted you down and brought you to bay, some of you," cried the deep, clear voice that every man heard distinctly. "You want to kill me, you say! I am ready to die, for my work among you is finished. You thought that in bringing me near death, three weeks ago, you would put an end to my work and so escape from the hangman—those of you who deserve his offices. Fools! The work is done; my last evidence is complete against the murderers I have been seeking. The papers are by now in Dublin Castle, and before long those of you who did that foul deed will swing for it."

There was a low, muffled roar, as of wild animals preparing to spring, when suddenly a cry rent the air—a cry of despair, remorse, surprise—which came from the lips of a man who emerged from

behind a tree—where he had been half carelessly listening to what had passed—to an open space, where he could see clearly the face of the man who stood on the steps.

"Stop! Stop! Boys, for the love of Heaven, stop! Oh, Heaven! save him!"

He sprang forward wildly, but his way was stopped, and he was thrown down.

Blake laughed aloud, a horrible, mocking laugh that drove his listeners to frenzy.

"You want my life! Come and take it, then! Cowards! devils! fiends! You shall pay a heavy reckoning for it! Oh, Heaven——"

He was down—struck full on the temple by a cruel, sharp stone, as the wild mob sprang at him, while Warden and the band of policemen threw themselves upon the mad, fighting throng of human beings, who struggled and tore at each other, hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder.

And the moon shone down its clear, cold light upon that scene of bloodshed, and lit up with an unearthly radiance the noble head of the man who lay on the top of the stone steps, while some one bent over him, trying in vain to restore the consciousness that seemed to have fled for ever. It was he who had uttered that passionate cry of warning just before the frenzy of the mob had reached its height; the man whom Mara had overheard that very morning plotting the devil's work that had just been done, whose voice had puzzled her by its likeness to her husband's; and his still handsome face was full of horror and remorse.

"Desmond!" he muttered. "Demie, my boy, the little lad I was once so fond of. I might have known by the name Desmond, yet I never guessed! . My poor boy! I might have saved him, and I have helped to kill him!"

Still he stayed on there, never noticing that the cries and shouts of the struggle died away gradually, till a rough hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Have ye not done enough to-night, without robbing him?"

He started to his feet, and looked round. Several policemen were there, their faces and hands stained with blood, their clothes torn, while with them stood their captives, handcuffs on their wrists, their downcast faces haggard and fearful. The fight was over!

"Robbing him!" he cried wildly. "I would have given my life to save him. Oh, my boy, my boy! And he is dead!"

Warden came out of their midst, and bent over Blake's unconscious form.

"He is not dead!" he said quietly. "Two of you carry him to his room, and send for a doctor at once."

The man grasped his arm fiercely.

"Not dead!" he cried. "Are you deceiving me? Is he not dead?"

"He is not dead now, but—" and Warden stopped, then gazed curiously at his questioner. "But what do you ask for? You are one of those cowardly devils who have done it."

"I came here meaning to kill him; I have plotted against him, never knowing who he was; but when I saw him I knew, and I would have died instead, gladly. You ask me why I show so much interest in him. I tell you I am his father—his father, and I have plotted to murder him!"

"His father!" Warden echoed. "Then Heaven forgive you! You are telling me the truth?" with a searching glance. "Yes, I see you are. I can do nothing for you now; I must go to Blake—and you must go to prison with the rest."

He did not answer, but held out his wrists in silence for the handcuff, and submitted to be led away, while Warden went slowly and sadly to the room which he feared Blake would never leave alive again.

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was the afternoon of the next day, and Mrs. O'Hara rapidly passed through the down-trodden garden and up the stone steps where still some blood-stains showed themselves. As she opened the door the doctor was coming downstairs.

"How is he?" she questioned eagerly. "Is he conscious?"

"He is conscious," he answered gravely, "but he is sinking fast."

She clasped her hands together with a shudder.

"There is no hope, then?"

"I fear not," and the doctor sighed as he spoke.

She left him and hurried upstairs to her son's room. Warden was with him, but he went away on her entrance, and mother and son were alone.

Desmond looked up with a smile as she sat down beside him.

"Has the doctor told you?"

"Yes. Oh, Demie, my boy, to think that you should die like this, so young, with the best part of your life before you! It—"

"Hush, mother, I will tell you something! I don't want to live; I would rather die. There, you must not ask me why. Only don't be very sorry for me; I am perfectly content. Where have you been now?"

Mrs. O'Hara looked at him steadily.

"I have been to the prison. Oh, Demie, I have something so strange to tell you, and I don't know how to do it!"

"To the prison!" he echoed. "But what for? Whom have you been to see?"

"I have been to see one of the men who was arrested here last night," she said, bending down and taking his hand as she spoke. "Some one who was once very dear to me. Oh, Demie, it is so awful! He was concerned in the plot against you, never knowing who you were—"

"But his name? Who is he?" cried Desmond.

"My husband—your father, Demie!" she said wildly, as he dropped her hand, and the old look of hatred that she knew so well came on his face. "You shall listen to me. You shall hear what I have to tell you!"

Desmond laughed bitterly.

"Yes, I must listen! And you have been to see him, have pitied him, and sympathised with him; and, after all, he is one of those who have brought me to this!"

"He had no hand in harming you. He tried to stop them when he recognised you, even after all these years, as his son. He is nearly mad from remorse and grief at having been connected ever so slightly with this horrible plot. Oh, Desmond, have mercy! He will be hung, as the others will, if you do not save him!"

"Save him! I have only a few more hours to live; how could I save him? And he deserves to be hung; why should I concern myself about him? Mother, mother, how can you love him still? Look at his conduct to you, his desertion of us, the life he has led, must have led, to be mixed up with these men!"

"I know, I know!" she sobbed. "And yet, Demie, he is my husband, and I love him even now. Demie, he is sorry, he is repentant! As you are dying, as you hope to go to heaven, give him back to me now! There must be some way."

Desmond lay silently thinking, and exhausted too. His strength was ebbing fast, he could hardly concentrate his thoughts on what his mother was saying.

"As I hope to go to heaven," he repeated dreamily. "Mother, I will help you. What can I do?"

She looked at him as if doubting whether he really meant it.

"You will?" she said. "Oh, Demie, thank Heaven! You forgive him now, you have put aside the old hatred?"

"I will put it aside," he said with a smile. "Give me a sheet of paper and pencil, and then raise me up."

Quickly she brought them, and then watched with a fierce pain at her heart the difficulty with which those once strong fingers traced the few words:

"I declare that the man Desmond O'Hara, at present detained in prison charged with having aided in the attack made upon me last night, is innocent of that charge. He did all in his power to save my life. I request that he shall be at once set free." DESMOND BLAKE."

The pencil fell from his hand, and he lay back on his pillows and gave her the paper.

"There, that is all I can do. I think—I hope that it will be enough. Are you satisfied now, mother? How strange it seems, does it not, that I, who have hated him all these years so bitterly, should now be the only man who can save him, if not from death, from Imprisonment? Go to him now, mother, give that paper to the first official you see, and tell him that it is to be attended to immediately. I know you will not be at rest till he is free."

"But you," she said. "I cannot leave you, Demie."

"Never mind about me," said Desmond with a smile. "I shall be here when you come back."

She rose doubtfully, love for her husband and love for her son struggling in her mind. But Desmond's smile reassured her.

"I shall not be long, then." She hesitated, and then went on: "Won't you send him a message, Demie? If only you knew how grieved he is! Just that you forgive him!"

"Yes, tell him that," said Desmond, "that I forgive him. Now go, mother. Good-bye. Come back to me soon."

Half an hour afterwards she re-entered the house, breathless from her haste, tired, yet with a feeling of glad relief, for the husband of her youth was given back to her, and even her grief for her son could not stifle the joy and happiness of that reunion. She even fancied, in her newborn hope, that Desmond might not be so ill as they thought. Doctors were not always infallible; surely Desmond, with

his splendid health and constitution, could not die as they predicted. But as she came into the hall and met Warden there, she only saw that he looked grave and sorrowful.

She clutched his arm wildly.

"Oh, tell me! How is he? Why do you look like that?"

"He is dead!" Warden answered simply.

Late that night Frank Warden came out of the Longford station and made his way rapidly towards Mara's house. Yes, she was there, the servants told him, in the drawing-room.

The door was open, and looking in, he saw Mara in the dim lamplight. She held a book in her hand, but she was not reading; her eyes were gazing away into space, and her face looked aged and worn even in the short time since he had seen her.

"Mara!" he said, and she sprang up and came towards him with an exclamation of surprise.

"You have come, then. How I have longed to be out of this suspense! And now I dare not ask you what—"

"You will not be startled at what I have to tell you," he said bitterly. "I know that I need not with you strive to warn and prepare for bad news. He is dead, Mara!"

A cry rang through the room.

"Oh, not dead! Frank, I thought you would save him! It cannot be true! Frank, Frank, don't let me think that I am his murderer! Say that it is not my fault—that I could not have saved him!"

He looked down at her unmoved; he was judging her more hardly than she deserved, for he thought that her grief was all a splendid piece of acting.

"It is a pity that your remorse comes so late. Mara, you have had no hand in his death, yet morally, if not actually, you have been his murderer! I, too, Heaven forgive me! If I had never loved you, Mara, he might have been alive now!"

He paused and looked at her; she had thrown herself on the sofa, her face hidden in her hands. Then a rush of the old chivalry to woman, that is innate in every true man, came over him. Had he misjudged her now; had he spoken too harshly? He went up to her and knelt by her side.

"Mara, we have both erred, bitterly erred. This awful punishment of remorse comes to both of us alike. Forgive me for the words I have said to you; the events of this last horrible day and night have shaken me so that I hardly know what I

say. Mara, there may be peace in store for us yet. Let us bear this burden together, it will be easier than alone."

Mara lifted her head, and he saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"No," she said sadly, "that can never be, Frank. Happiness nor peace either can never come to us together. You are sorry for me now you see that what I am suffering now is almost hard enough punishment for what I have done, but in years to come you would think of the past, and you would curse yourself for having married such as I. Listen to me, Frank; don't stop me for a minute. I have never loved you; never, not even when I came to you yesterday at the peril of my good name; I never loved my husband. I married him because I was poor, and saw no chance of marrying any one better; I came to you yesterday, I have feigned to be in love with you all along—because you are rich. Oh, Frank, I see now, when it is too late, what my life has been, and what I might have made it! Do you wonder that the knowledge is almost crushing me?"

Warden was silent at first, and then he rose from his chair, and held out his hand.

"You are right," he said. "I do not believe that happiness could ever come to us together. I will leave you—and yet—Mara, I never loved you as I do at this moment! Now, when your past life, your character, your faults, are bare before me, I love you better than I ever did! I would forgive the faults, I would forget the past, if you were my wife!"

She shook her head.

"No. That past will ever haunt us both. Frank, don't let us prolong this scene, it is only pain to both of us. Go! leave me, and pray to heaven that we may never meet again!"

He held both her hands, he looked down with a last long look at her lovely, sorrowful face, and then with a sudden impulse, he framed it in his hands and kissed it for the last time.

"Good-bye!" and the next moment she was alone, while Frank Warden went out into the starlit night, knowing well that in all human probability, his path in life would never again cross that of the woman he had just left. With all her faults;

with hardly a true feeling or noble impulse in her nature, Mara yet had one supreme attribute which many better women lack—the power of gaining and holding till death the hearts of the men who loved her.

EPILOGUE.

A LARGE ship dropped slowly away from the Belfast Docks and out to sea. Its passengers were talking and laughing, forming into merry groups, making friends with each other even at this early stage of the voyage, and apart from the rest, leaning over the vessel's side with their eyes on the receding shore, were two people, a man with a face still handsome in spite of its lines and haggardness, and a woman in deep mourning.

What were they leaving behind them, that they looked back at the shore so long and so fixedly? They had neither friends nor kindred, neither hopes nor interests in the old world; the one thing that bound them to it, where the thoughts of both were now, was a grave far away in Kerry, bearing the name, "Desmond Blake."

The ship travelled on, the shore grew faint and misty, and as its last outline faded those two turned away with a sigh. Let them go—go on to that New World before them, there to seek for, and perchance to find, happiness and prosperity.

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